

PHD

Comparative Analysis Of Women's Autobiographical Narratives In English And Their Translations In Italian And French

J. Winterson, A.S. Byatt And Jamaica Kincaid: Three Case Studies

Maestri, Eliana

Award date:
2011

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

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CHAPTER FOUR

Dialogic Spaces and Intertextual Resonances in the French

Translation of A.S Byatt's Autobiographical Story 'Sugar'¹4.1 Introduction: Autobiography/Autofiction *Querelle* Revisited

The French version of A.S. Byatt's 'Sugar' (1995, orig. 1987), 'Le Sucre' (1997a, orig. 1989), translated by Jean-Louis Chevalier, appeared in the collection *Le Sucre et autres récits*. Similarly to the Italian volume *Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato* (2000), the French collection is accompanied by a paratext, in this case a preface, which provides the reader and the scholar with key information. The preface by Byatt, which opens *Le Sucre et autres récits*, situates the French translation at the very heart of the receiving culture, a culture dominated by a *querelle littéraire* between autobiography, theorized by Philippe Lejeune in 1971 and in subsequent years, and 'autofiction', its omnipresent competitor, theorized by Serge Doubrovsky in 1981. In his work Lejeune intended autobiography as practised, for instance, by Rousseau, Verlaine or Gide, who set the code of conduct for 'autobiography proper', that writing practice that is constructed upon glorious, if nostalgic, accounts of childhood and the 'mythe du Moi' (Lejeune 1998: 72). In opposition to Lejeune, Doubrovsky coined the term 'autofiction' to problematize 'une question majeure' (Doubrovsky 1993: 209), namely 'l'histoire d'une vraie vie' (Doubrovsky 1988: 69) and the nature of truth in autobiographical writing, especially in view of the erroneous and/or artificial aspect of memory. Grown out of an effervescent period of convergence between poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, Doubrovsky wrote his own autobiography *Fils: Roman* (1977) and the theoretical essay

¹ Earlier versions of some sections of Chapter Four will be published in Maestri (forthcoming).

‘Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse’ (1988) to reflect upon the constitutive incoherence, the Pirandellian ambiguity and intrinsic aporias to be found in his own novel. By focusing on the fruitful, yet dubious and troublesome, mixture of truth and fiction, he embraced a more self-conscious approach to autobiographical writing, aware of its unavoidable limitations, compelling artefacts and fantastic additions. The autobiography/autofiction *querelle* has since then flourished in France and benefited from the theoretical and critical contributions of various scholars – for instance Gérard Genette (1991), Jacques Lecarme and Éliane Lecarme-Tabone (1997) and Vincent Colonna (2004) – who, still nowadays, consider autobiographical writing (and its fictional variations) as the most popular mode of writing in contemporary France.

Byatt’s preface to ‘Le Sucre’ is itself a translation by Chevalier of the essay “‘Sugar” / “Le Sucre”” which appeared in her collection *Passions of the Mind* (1991) and reflects on her autobiographical short story ‘Sugar’ and its French version. Byatt speaks about her own text in canonical terms, introducing the subject with a typically Lejeunian ‘revendication du nom propre’ (Lecarme 1992: 244). The preface opens in fact with a traditional declaration of ownership and authentication of the narrated facts: ‘l’idée de cette histoire s’est présentée à moi, en premier lieu, comme une sorte de tentation’ (Byatt 1997b: 9). Here the personal pronoun ‘moi’, around which the whole project revolves, not only illustrates to the French reader the reason for the publication of the text, it also authenticates ‘Le Sucre’ as a ‘real’ autobiography founded on an autobiographical contract between narrator, author and main hero of/in the text. The preface then illustrates in detail the temptation and seduction in which the project originated and identifies the death of Byatt’s father as the driving force and real motive behind the story: ‘le dessin de Sugar a pris naissance devant moi, a pris forme, avec élégance, avec séduction, quelques années après la mort de mon père’ (Byatt 1997b: 9).

Guided by this enlightening preface, French readers would then expect to find at the very start of ‘Le Sucre’ a typical ‘rite de présentation’ (Lejeune 1998: 49),

followed by a classical autobiography (in the style of the male writers praised by Lejeune) with the figure of the father as the main character. As Lejeune explains, the narrative discourse does not often start with the moment the author is born, but with ‘une sorte d’acte de naissance du discours [...]: exposé d’intention [...] réfutation d’objection ou de critique’ (Lejeune 1998: 49). Instead, however, the incipit of the short story is rather confusing and misleading in that the credible birth of narrative discourse can only be identified at the beginning of the second page with ‘je n’ai pas entrepris d’écrire sur cela. J’ai entrepris d’écrire sur mon grand-père paternel, que j’ai à peine connu, et dont je sais fort peu de chose’ (‘Le Sucre’: 21-22). The driving force is clearly not the father, as anticipated in the preface. The very first page is devoted to the mother who played a crucial role as transmitter of familial memories. In view of this role, the mother is depicted as an inaccurate storyteller who, as discussed in Chapter Three, resorted to lies and fabrications to embellish her stories and attract her audience. The mother, the father, the grandfather and other members of the family are clearly not employed to construct the Lejeunian ‘mythe du Moi’. They are a pretext to reflect upon ‘certains mythes de l’origine que j’avais assemblés quand j’étais enfant’ (‘Le Sucre’: 45).

French readers might therefore wonder what purpose the preface really serves and why it has been added to the French edition if Byatt’s theoretical project outlined therein clashes with the autobiographical purpose of ‘Le Sucre’ (as intended by Lejeune). The clash could instead be considered as part of a ‘rhétorique de la sincérité’ (Lejeune quoted in González-Salvador 1982: 52) which only a proper and genuine autobiographer can prove to have. It would be incorrect to state that Byatt does not attempt to engage with a Lejeunian model of autobiography. Her short story can in fact be read as a self-conscious study of autobiographical writing, which reveals a stubborn attempt to comply with rigid structural principles and endeavours to convey a sense of nostalgia, glory and pride for a mythical childhood in a quasi Garden of Eden. The Lejeunian model that Byatt seems to experiment with happens to be embodied by her beloved father who is imbued with supreme principles of exactitude, formal accuracy and nostalgia for

his mythical past and heroic journey through life. Fascinated by her father's respect for beauty, glory and heroism and by the strength of his model as an antidote against the fallibilities of memory, Byatt intends to tell the story of her own life in her father's name. She wants to start from her paternal grandfather in order to move on to sing the praises of her father's moral rectitude and love for truth, but at every step her project seems to be disrupted by uncertainties, fears and melancholia. Her mother's inaccurate memories also play a crucial role in the crumbling of the author's project because her contradictions question continually the validity of the words of the other members of the family (and especially Byatt's father). In the end, the author neither succeeds in her initial enterprise nor does she refrain from problematizing her father's model.

In the light of these considerations, both the incipit of 'Le Sucre' and the French preface appear to work in symbiosis, a symbiosis that would not have occurred had the preface been added to the English collection *Sugar and Other Stories*. If it had been, the preface would not have succeeded in justifying the special role of the father figure. In French, both the incipit and the preface reveal a tension between two models and two parental figures, a tension which is resolved by the author's ultimate appreciation of the artificiality of memory in auto/biographical writing, as embodied, however, by the mother figure. In the opening of the text the prominence and recognition given to the mother are unmistakable, but in the French preface they are even more unambiguous because the author clearly unveils the mother's special role in her search for auto/biographical models. She admits that her mother was crucially important at a metaphorical level and that, when she wrote 'Sugar', she used her almost 'en secret' (Byatt 1997b: 9) to study the intrinsic nature of fiction and lies in life writing and, more generally, in storytelling, as shown by Chapter Three. However, as the preface was written after the completion of the French translation of 'Sugar', it is reasonable to wonder whether this secret intention was subconsciously present in the author's mind before the start of 'Sugar' or whether such awareness was raised at a later date, namely as a reflection of what the translation disclosed to the author herself. It is imperative to underline that in the English text, the role of the mother and her

inevitably inaccurate telling of past events as an alternative mode of life writing are not always welcome. Byatt does not surrender her initial study of form nor does she stop admiring her father's ideal, if unreal, model. Most of the time, she does not take her mother's words for granted, but she questions them against her father's testimonies. The English readers of 'Sugar' have a clear impression that, when comparing the two parental figures as metaphors for opposing models of life writing, Byatt aligns with her father, despite admitting that chaos and fallacies are inevitable elements to be factored into an autobiography. In French this alignment is not always clear or definite, especially at the end of the preface when Byatt comes to embrace her mother's view that 'nous fabriquons, nous inventons, ce que nous éprouvons et voyons' (Byatt 1997b: 17).

The aim of this chapter is to explore why Byatt believes that 'Le Sucre' represents 'une autre vision [...] une nouvelle vision exacte de mon monde' (Byatt 1997b: 17) and why she finishes by accepting the mother's fabricated approach to storytelling in the French preface. In order to do so, I will analyze what I believe is the most problematic character in the story, namely the mother, and why she receives far more attention and space than the father. She is the temptress and the insolent contestant of traditional modes of autobiographical writing imbued with male grandeur and old-fashioned pretences of exactitude. She responds imaginatively and ingeniously to the canon by suggesting alternative visions of her world and creative examples of life telling. Could French readers interpret her challenge to the paternal principles as a literary allegory of the autobiography/autofiction *querelle*? Is she, in French, the new Serge Doubrovsky undermining the precepts of his master and theoretical predecessor Philippe Lejeune? Could we argue that the preface was added to the French edition both to justify the translator's own rereading of the mother-father disputes and to echo the current literary debate on autobiography? Tempted and persuaded by the French preface to 'Le Sucre', I believe that the mother represents the key to understanding how and why the French translation changes the original text. A comparative analysis of 'Sugar' and 'Le Sucre' will also enable me to engage in a rereading of the French literary *querelle* from a gendered perspective.

Unlike the father's linear mode of storytelling, the mother does not follow any chronological and/or logical order. Her stories do not offer any 'illusion rétrospective' (Lejeune 1998: 29) because her memories are not structured along a coherent, life-like and linear time frame. On the contrary, they seem to move freely and happily across a proliferation of contiguous spaces with no clear or rational links. They are tied together by a strong desire to explore familiar and exotic places beyond temporal constraints. The dimension that she seems to value the most, however, is the intersubjective space between herself and her daughter, the author A.S. Byatt, a relational and comprehensive realm full of affection and warmth. In this light, an analysis of the mother's approach to space is useful to explore her potential as a storyteller and her challenges to traditional autobiographical principles from a gendered point of view. To this effect, Marie Maclean's framework of analysis of spatial representations and interrelations in fiction offers a valuable methodological approach. Maclean (1988) draws on postmodern theorizations of space that enhance its fluidity and dynamism by conceptualizing it as a spider's web or a skein whose threads reconnect and disconnect disparate points along vertical, horizontal, transversal and oblique axes. According to these theorizations, which recall Byatt's mother's skein-like narrative style, already analyzed in Chapter Three, space is not a vacuum or a static concept (*res extensa*), as illustrated for instance by Kant. It is a dialogic entity in constant dialogue with the subject (*res cogitans*) who participates in its production and formation. Hence Maclean's model, based on spatial relationships constituted by deixis and specified iconically, will inform a consideration of space from an unconventional point of view. On the one hand, it will help to reconstruct the connection of maternal sensitivity to intersubjective space, and on the other, it will help to identify how the French translation reterritorializes and reshapes the mother's dynamic interspatiality in relation to storytelling and life writing. In so doing, I will also follow Genette's advice that scholars should explore the semantic spatiality of literary discourse not only in terms of poetic descriptions of places and landscapes, but also in terms of 'rapports horizontaux de voisinage et

de succession, [...] rapports qu'on peut dire verticaux, ou transversaux' (Genette 1969: 46).

4.2 The Mirror Stage as Deictic Space of Interrelational Explorations

The first space that I will analyze with the help of deixis is the 'narrative transaction proper' (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 86) which defines the interrelational space between narrator and narratee. In 'Sugar' this space is extremely relevant and highly hybridized, because the narrative movement between those two narratological entities is incessant, allowing continuously for role-swapping. The short story is the outcome of a number of conversations between Byatt, the narrator *de facto*, and her parents, the object of her narration, namely the narratees. However, since they are her interlocutors in charge of narrating the myth of origin, they also represent other kinds of authorial 'Je', namely other narratorial authorities responsible for advancing the narrative. The incipit in 'Sugar' dramatizes this intersubjective space characterized by dialogism, dynamism and a series of underlying shifts along the transversal axis of the text. A comparative analysis with 'Le Sucre' will help to cast light on new perspectives and reconfigurations of the mother-daughter's geographical sense of self.

Example 1

My mother had a respect for truth, but she was not a truthful woman. She once said to me, her lip trembling, her eyes sharp to detect my opinion, "Your father says I am a terrible liar. But I'm not a liar, am I? I'm not." Of course she was not, I agreed, colluding, as we all always did, for the sake of peace and of something else, a half-desire to help her, for things to be as she said they were. But she was. She lied in small matters, to tidy up embarrassments, and in large matters, to avoid unpalatable truths. She lied floridly and beautifully, in her rare moments of relaxation, to make a story better. She was a breathless and breathtaking raconteur, not often, and sometimes over-insistently, but at her best reducing her audience to tears of helpless laughter. She also told other kinds of story, all the time latterly, all the time we were in her company, monotonous, malevolent, unstructured complaints, full of increasingly fabricated evidence of non-existent wickedness. ('Sugar': 215-16)

Ma mère avait du respect pour la vérité, mais ce n'était pas une femme véridique. Elle me dit une fois, la lèvre tremblante, le regard attentif à déceler mon opinion: «Ton père dit que je suis une terrible menteuse. Mais je ne le suis pas. Est-ce que

je mens, moi? Non!» Bien sûr que non, j'en convins, abondant dans son sens, comme nous le faisons toujours tous, par amour de la paix, et par égard pour autre chose, un semi-désir de lui venir en aide, de faire que les choses fussent comme elle disait qu'elles étaient. Mais c'était bien une menteuse. Elle mentait sur des sujets mineurs, pour se tirer d'embarras, et sur des sujets plus importants, pour éviter des vérités dures à digérer. Elle mentait avec panache, en toute beauté, dans ses rares moments de détente, pour embellir une histoire. C'était une raconteuse qui avait du souffle, et qui vous coupait le souffle, pas souvent, et parfois avec une insistance importune, mais qui, au mieux de sa forme, faisait rire son auditoire à s'en rendre malade. Elle racontait aussi d'autres sortes d'histoires, sans arrêt dans les derniers temps, sans arrêt quand nous lui tenions compagnie, lamentations incohérentes, malveillantes, monotones, remplies de preuves de plus en plus controuvées d'une iniquité chimérique. ('Le Sucre': 21)

This excerpt is mainly concerned with assessing who the liar is among the members of the family. However, it also presents interesting dynamics that might be overlooked if the reader takes too much time with deciding who to side with (namely with the mother as liar or with the father as accuser). Whereas the physiognomic description of the father focuses on his hair, colour and shape, the mother's portrayal mentions her eyes and lips, thus locating the entire passage in the 'enclosure' (Kristeva 1984: 51) of the maternal space.

Although apparently insignificant, these details establish the gendered nature of the space of 'narrative transaction proper' and emphasize the centrality of the mother's face in Byatt's emotional development. In an essay which was first published in 1967, object-relations theorist Donald W. Winnicott underlines the importance of '*the mother's face*' as '*the precursor of the mirror*' (Winnicott 2000: 144, author's italics) in emotional upbringing. Not only does the mother's face take part in the maturational process of the child, it also enacts the stage of the mirror,² which starts when the mother's face begins to be perceived as a mirror by the child who, thanks to this, becomes aware of itself as an individual, namely as a separate person from its mother (the mirror image). In 'Sugar', the child is trapped in a series of mirror games with the mother's gaze and defines her dependence on the mother's face in terms of spatial intersubjectivity. In 'Le Sucre', the subjective interchange is faithfully rendered, but the very moment of

² For an enlightening explanation of the mirror stage, see Elizabeth Grosz (1990).

self-awareness via the m/other's face (and metonymically her eyes) is located in a reconfigured proxemic space, within which the female protagonists reposition themselves. This is evident, first of all, in the differential use of deictics which 'organise temporal and spatial relations around the "subject" taken as a point of reference' (Benveniste quoted in Maclean 1988: 111). As the principal deictic relationship is, according to Maclean, 'the I-you, speaker-hearer, relationship of both *énonciation* and *énoncé*' (Maclean 1988: 110-11, author's italics), I will now examine all those personal pronouns which enhance, in the French text, the rapport between speaker and hearer, narrator and narratee, daughter and mother.

In French the linguistic repetition of the third person singular pronoun is briskly interrupted directly after 'bien sûr que non' which renders the English 'of course she was not'. In terms of deixis, the omission of the pronoun is fundamental to extend the effect of a real conversation between the two subjects placed by the text in vertiginous proximity, namely face to face. In addition, the French 'bien sûr que non', as Free Indirect Speech, echoes the emphatic tone used by the mother and empowers the daughter-narrator's point of view. As it can be observed, the French reported speech carries emphatic punctuation, among which is an exclamation mark that does not appear in the original, and, which adds more weight and vigour to the maternal words. As a result, the mother acquires corporeal presence which is, as Maclean explains, a consequence of all deictics and which compensates for the lack of any real existence outside the boundaries of a text. The deictic mother-daughter relationship in French has the beneficial effect of shortening the gap between the two subjects and strengthening their affectionate relationship.

The proximity between the mother and daughter is also evident in French by the translation of 'colluding' upon which depends the reading of another deictic 'we all' in 'as we all did'. In English 'we all' could stand for Byatt and her siblings who 'collude'. The ambiguous position of 'collude' in English makes the action of deceiving even more equivocal. They might collude in favour of the mother against their father or, more probably, in the light of what follows, between

themselves in order to give their mother the illusion of having things as she wanted. There is, therefore, in English a further separation from the mother, referred to by the third person pronoun 'her', in 'a half-desire to help her', used in English exclusively to talk about a third person not present in the room (otherwise referred to by his/her name for reasons of politeness). This pushes the mother away from the actual scene in English, relegating her into a space *hors texte*, a space-other, memorial but not textually actualized. The extensive use of third person singular pronouns, such as 'her' and 'she', gives almost the impression of a postmodern theatrical aside, a space occupied only by Byatt and her siblings admitting the English reader/audience to their ganging up together to deceive their own mother. In French, on the contrary, the initial ambiguity of colluding is not present. 'Colluding' is in fact translated with 'abondant dans son sens' which has no secondary implications and which means 'venir à l'appui de son opinion'.³ This fairly literary expression does not imply any secret or deceitful action against somebody. There is no target, no Chinese whisper, no big secret to disclose to the reader/audience and no audience. No theatrical scene is set to disclose the suspension of disbelief, no collusion between readers/audience and the narrator. The maternal enclosure is the only textual space, a space where Byatt and the other children, deictically identified and objectified with 'tous' in French, support their own mother.

The drama effect is recovered and, therefore compensated for, in the second part of the French passage when the narrator moves on to sing the praises of her mother's storytelling abilities. The deictic 'vous' in 'qui vous coupait le souffle' engages with a virtual audience and reinforces the theatricality both of the mother, the best actress and raconteur, and the text. It is only at this point that the theatre curtains are opened in French. The intimacy of the scene prevails and it is shared exclusively among privileged family members, namely the children and the mother (not the father). The French translation seems, therefore, to enact the same

³ *Le Dictionnaire multifonctions*

(<http://dictionnaire.tv5.org/dictionnaires.asp?Action=1&mot=abonder&che=1>) [accessed on 10 November 2005].

mechanism postulated by Winnicott, where ‘fathers are marginalized’ (Aitken and Herman 1997: 72). Byatt’s father is practically excluded and the mother and the child, together with other siblings, are realigned in French so as to form a unity and the core of this passage. Even if the French sentence reveals, like the English one, that they back up their mother only for things to be as she expected them to be, their support is also motivated by a tension towards her: ‘un semi-désir de lui venir en aide’.

The French verb ‘venir’, in ‘un semi-désir de lui venir en aide’, also contributes to strengthen the proxemic space between the children and the mother in French, making even more explicit their positioning within the maternal enclosure. There is no independent and autonomous system of orientation for the French narrator. ‘Venir’ generally indicates closeness between speaker and listener and, consequently, between narrator and narratee (the mother as well as the reader).⁴ In addition, the verb ‘venir’ activates a series of anaphoric translations that reproduce the same tension and vectorial movement towards the mother, reinstating the same pivotal point of attraction. Almost at the end of the passage another similar expression ‘nous lui tenions compagnie’ confers upon the mother-children relationship a kinaesthetic quality that is lacking in the static verb ‘to be in’: ‘we were in her company’. Both French verbs make the entire scene more dynamic and reflect, as in a mirror image, or a mirror stage, the movement of the mother’s eyes, exemplified in the French ‘regard’, in search for her child. Perception, apperception and affection, as explained by Winnicott, are con/fused when it is the mother’s face that the child sees reflected in the mirror. By mirroring her mother’s facial expressions and by echoing her words, the child Byatt becomes aware of herself as a human being and of the power of the mother’s words: ‘when I look I am seen, so I exist’ (Winnicott 2000: 147). Sight, gaze, mirror images and the visual are fundamental in the artistic formation of the child born in the eyes of the mother/ beholder.

⁴ The idea of movement in French is strengthened also by the use of the old-fashioned verb ‘convenir’ (to agree), that we can also read as ‘con-venir’ (to come with).

In this light, the beginning of ‘Le Sucre’ appears to parody and destabilize the classical autobiographer’s incipit techniques postulated by Lejeune and critiqued in detail by Doubrovsky. In so doing, ‘Le Sucre’ not only shifts towards autofiction, but it also supports and expands postmodern problematizations and reconceptualizations of space. In ‘Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse’, Doubrovsky explains that classical autobiographical writing, so warmly praised by Lejeune, flaunts one particular initial aspect: the mirror. As part of the ‘rite de présentation’, the mirror (metaphorical as well as real) becomes the preferred instrument for the autobiographer’s self-study, self-description and self-revelation. By looking at the mirror, the classical autobiographer sees ‘la solitude romantique, du «moi seul»’ (Doubrovsky 1988: 73). Enclosed in his own solitude and silence, the autobiographer does not contemplate narcissistic pleasure. He does not strive to see a better self, a more appealing or a more successful image than that which he thinks he can see. He has, instead, the illusion of seeing himself, his entire and bare self displayed in the reflected mirror image, the ‘*Gestalt précise et stable*’ of himself (Doubrovsky 1988: 62). Carried away by this illusion, he then pursues his own vision in order to make the visual and the readable coincide, namely in order to write about what he thinks is real. He starts with a physical description which soon acquires physiognomic nuances. The physical traits, captured in the space between his own mirror and the stool where he sits, not only reflect the bare physicality of his own body, the wrinkles on his forehead and/or the signs of fatigued aging, they also become emblematic of his moral qualities and faults: ‘l’aspect physique [...] est prioritaire: il *délimite* les assises du sujet, en fixe le profil spirituel, «qualités» et «défauts», à des contours aisément repérables’ (Doubrovsky 1988: 62, my italics).

The above-mentioned incipit of ‘Le Sucre’, on the contrary, does not display the singularity of the authorial image. The latter, instead, is caught in an almost vertiginous and boundary-free space that the narrator shares with the m/other. Authorial solitude is replaced by the tension towards the m/other and by the company that the two subjects keep for one another. In these terms, the beginning of ‘Le Sucre’ situates the French translation along a literary path which deviates

from ‘[l’] être-pour-soi du sujet’ (typical of classical autobiography) and which leads toward ‘l’être-pour-autrui’ (Doubrovsky 1988: 62), a dialogic discovery of the self via the other advocated by Doubrovsky for autofiction. The French translation offers a text full of autofictional reminiscences, which, while portraying all the prismatic faces of the author/narrator, enhance intersubjectivity as a key spatial element in the exploration of the self. Truth and the real are retrieved in the eyes and voice of the m/other as well as, as Doubrovsky would add, ‘par le mouvement de son écriture’ (1988: 69). By turning to psychoanalysis, as a constitutive strategy for autofiction, Doubrovsky rejects time/chronology, as a Lejeunian mode of autobiographical reconnaissance, and traditional concepts of space, conceived in Cartesian thought as an ‘objective homogenous extension’ (Wegner 2002: 181) unaffected by the subject that inhabits it. In autofiction as well as in ‘Le Sucre’, time and space are maternal and intersubjective realms which do not follow any canonical rule, but which reshape their orientation to perceive the polyphonic dialogue between the object of vision (*res extensa*) and the subject of vision (*res cogitans*). By including the other as an equally valid authorial eye/I, the ‘French’ Byatt follows Doubrovsky’s steps and leaves the gap between subject and object open and porous. It is this gap that encourages horizontal mobility and a continuous reorganization of the landscape as a projected dimension of internal worlds embracing the un/familiar other as its other self.

The description of the artist at the mirror in ‘Le Sucre’ does not reveal a conscious desire of symbiotic fusion with the mother, especially because she says that ‘je n’ai pas entrepris d’écrire sur cela [ma mère]. J’ai entrepris d’écrire sur mon grand-père’ (‘Le Sucre’: 22). Despite that, the mirror reveals the narrator’s desire to retrieve her childhood and relationship with her mother who justifies and defines her existence as a person and as an artist. Thanks to the spatial reinterpretation of the French text, such sentences as ‘je me rappelle bien qu’elle pourvoyait à notre besoin insatiable de lecture’ (‘Le Sucre’: 48) do not remain isolated in the text. They are echoed and strengthened by the initial portrait of the artist, drawn in the name of the mother. It is the maternal tension towards the

child/narrator (so very well dramatized by the French adjective ‘attentive’)⁵ which celebrates the birth of the work of art. Extending the effect of a real face-to-face conversation the French incipit recalls the time spent in the company of the mother who, while dramatizing and embellishing family facts and anecdotes, contributes to the discursive construction of the daughter’s life. Her vision is unmistakably and ‘indissolublement liée à son [de ma mère] récit de témoin oculaire’ (‘Le Sucre’: 26). Mapping the mother’s emotional traits by looking at all ‘the lines and all the features of this “ancient landscape”’ (Winnicott 2000: 147) generates unprecedented energy and aesthetic movement leading to the child’s progressive exploration of her own face, of what is ‘not me’ (Winnicott quoted in Gunn 1988: 103) and, later on in life, of artistic production. It is the initial encounter with the mother’s face and the mother’s word (creatively rendered, as we shall see, as ‘chimérique’ in French) that influences Byatt’s literary style, often described as flourished and elaborate. The care and imagination characterizing the French translation enhance, therefore, the artistic implications of this intersubjective space. They strengthen the link with the author’s artistic confession in the preface while textualizing Byatt’s ‘secret’ desire to translate the unavoidable (but painful) separation from the mother’s body into artistic creativity, inventiveness and literary inspiration founded upon duality, physical proximity and negotiation of meaning and truth.

‘Le Sucre’ is also characterized by specific typographical and lexical choices which highlight the translator’s sensitivity to the mother’s emotional and artistic role. The initial physiognomic portrait of the mother figure (which expands Example 1 by describing the mother’s abilities as a storyteller) is overtly marked, only in ‘Le Sucre’, by a blank line which separates the textual incipit from the rest of the autobiographical story. This hiatus is not to be read as a thematic severance, but, especially in the light of my analysis, as an imaginary frame encasing typographically the maternal ‘enclosure’ along with its aesthetic value. It should

⁵ While the English ‘sharp’ mainly denotes speed or agility when combined with the semantic field of vision, the French adjective ‘attentive’ connotes, according to *Le Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*, ‘celui qui est prêt, qui a l’esprit tendu vers quelque chose’ (<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/attentif>) [accessed on 4 May 2006].

also be noticed that the second description that follows the incipit, striving to recall the physiognomic traits of the ill father, is rendered very faithfully by the French translator who continues to underline, however, even indirectly, the positive impact of the mother figure upon the daughter's personal and artistic formation. This is a more static description than the maternal one whose technique evokes more closely the *modus operandi* of the classical self-portrait, criticized by Doubrovsky: 'my father was a handsome man, in a very English way, blue-eyed, fair-skinned, with fine red-gold hair that very slowly lost its fire and turned rusty and then white' ('Sugar': 216). The fragmented description of complexion, hair, eyes and general appearance turns the portrait into an emblematic painting of the father's moral qualities: 'a silent man but by no means a cold or distant man' ('Sugar': 217). In French, the only energy released by this description seems to come from an internal textual motility, which, unfortunately, excludes the daughter from the entire scene. Unlike the incipit's energetic charge, the only textual movement that runs along transversal lines traces similarities between the father's physical attributes, moral qualities and verbal infertility. Despite the attraction that he exercises upon his daughter, recalled a number of times throughout Byatt's autobiographical text, his glorious singing of a heroic past reveals to be unproductive, fruitless and, in French even more than in English, inimitable. The barrier between the old and the young generation is lexically rendered in French by the unsurprisingly strong adjective 'infranchissable' ('Le Sucre': 22) which strengthens the English metaphor 'absolute barrier' ('Sugar': 216) but which also evokes an idea of boundary, of circumscribed space that cannot be stepped over and crossed easily. These linguistic observations suggest that, despite the initial conscious motivations for writing this autobiographical story, the narrator feels more comfortable with exploring the maternal space, a welcoming realm that leaves room for movement, experiment and self-discovery.

4.3 The Iconicity of the House as the Transitional Mother-Daughter Space

I will now proceed to the second category of space in Maclean's scheme: 'iconically specified by spatial relationship' (1988: 111). According to Maclean, this includes what is generally known as scene, defined, in the theory of the novel, not only as setting but also as a 'moment dramatized in a specific time/place location' (Kestner quoted in Maclean 1988: 111). The time/place location, which is being analyzed here, focuses on the symbolic and evocative icon of the house, with particular attention to the narrator's geographical sense of self. The aim is to determine whether the French translation continues to strengthen the link with the maternal thus promoting the development of an autofictional narrator inclined to give body and voice to the dialogic nature of the self. Space localizers and, in particular, the recurrent use of the preposition of place 'dans' will be used to highlight the main differences between ST and TT.

Example 2

She liked to tell the same few exemplary episodes over and over: [...] my own first wintry visit to the dark Blythe House. ('Sugar': 220)

Elle aimait à raconter quelques épisodes exemplaires, toujours les mêmes, tant et plus: [...] ma première visite, l'hiver, dans la sombre Blythe House. ('Le Sucre': 28)

Example 3

We left one of these houses for Pontefract, during the war, for fear of bombs, and came back to the other. ('Sugar': 235)

Nous quittâmes une de ces maisons pour Pontefract, pendant la guerre, par peur des bombes, et revînmes nous installer dans l'autre. ('Le Sucre': 50)

Example 4

She herself had represented to my father a human normality, a domestic warmth, an ease of communion quite absent from the chill household and extravagant passions amongst which he had grown up. ('Sugar': 219-20)

Elle avait représenté pour mon père une existence normale, la chaleur d'un foyer et une communion naturelle totalement absentes de la maisonnée glaciale, aux passions extravagantes, dans laquelle il avait grandi. ('Le Sucre': 27)